



**ANNA  
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**A PERFECT  
LUCKY CHARM**

**Anna Sugden**

# **A Perfect Lucky Charm**



A New Jersey Ice Cats short story

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## A Perfect Lucky Charm

“Today’s your lucky day, Paddy. You’ll score in the first period.”

Patrick ‘Paddy’ Mullroney rolled his eyes at his New Jersey Ice Cats’ team-mate, Kenny Jelinek. “March 17<sup>th</sup> is just another day to me. I’m not freaking Irish.”

At least, he didn’t think so. He’d been christened by the nuns at the Catholic orphanage where he’d been dumped as a baby. There hadn’t been a note asking for forgiveness. No clue as to who’d thrown him away like garbage. No name. Paddy ignored the twist in his gut and focused on taping his stick.

Kenny shrugged. “Take any help you can get to break your scoring slump, man – even if it’s only your name on St. Patrick’s Day. Hell, I’d change mine to O’Jelinek if it got me a goal.”

“That’s superstitious crap. Lucky charms, wishing on stars or skating counter-clockwise around the ice don’t affect your play. The harder you work, the better your ‘luck’.”

“Well, Oi’ll be hopin’ for all the luck of the Oirish for ya this afternoon, boyo. So oi will.” His friend ditched the corny accent. “We need to beat the Flyers, to keep our Wild Card spot.”

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Paddy pulled on his Cats sweater. “We play our game for sixty minutes and we’ll get the ‘W’. No luck required.”

Thankfully, it was time for the pre-game warm-up, so he strode out of the locker room. The chilled air made his lungs tingle, whilst anticipation made his blood pump faster.

Coming out of the tunnel, he saw the usual crowd leaning over the glass wall, waiting for the players.

“You gonna score tonight?” called a dark-haired boy in a red Mullroney jersey.

“I’ll do my best, Max.” Paddy tapped his glove against the kid’s hand.

“Today’s your lucky day.”

“Yeah.” His grin barely faltered. “I’d better hit the ice or the boss will scratch me.”

“Sure.” Max nodded. “Say hi to Aunt Shayla first. Dad had to work and couldn’t make the afternoon face-off.”

Paddy’s attention shifted to the woman standing beside the ten-year-old and was captivated by a pair of laughing, emerald eyes.

He almost tripped over his skates.

Damn, he hadn’t lost his cool like that since Juniors, when a puck-bunny-in-the-making had flashed her breasts after he’d scored a hat-trick.

Shayla was petite and pretty. Shiny, dark hair framed her face. Her nose and cheeks were pink from the cold. Her green sweater matched her eyes and

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hugged her curves. From each ear hung a rainbow, with a pot of gold and shamrock beneath. The whole delectable package was enough to make him reconsider his stance on St. Patrick's Day.

He tried not to gawp like a teenager. "Hi."

"Good luck," she said, huskily.

He cleared his suddenly dry throat. "Uh ... thanks."

A stick poked him in the back. "Let's go," JB Larocque said, a knowing look in his dark eyes. "Time to get to work."

Paddy nodded at Shayla, forcing his legs to move.

As he skated around the Cats' half of the rink, the tension tightening his muscles began to ease. During the shooting drills, pucks flew into the net.

"You may not be Irish, but your stick's heating up, for sure." Kenny's shot hit the pipes.

"That's not all that's heating up." Larocque smirked as he whipped the puck past goaltender, Ike Jelinek.

Paddy told the stud winger to do an anatomically impossible sexual act.

The ribbing continued, until the horn blew for the end of the warm-ups. As Paddy headed off the ice, his heart jolted when he saw Shayla smiling at him.

Kenny pushed past, wolf-whistling under his breath.

Paddy resisted the urge to hook Kenny's skates from under him and tried to look nonchalant when

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Shayla stuck out her hand for him to tap.

Despite his thick glove, electricity shot up Paddy's arm when he touched her.

At the same moment, something glittery fell to the matting by his skate. The shamrock from one of her earrings.

He removed his glove, picked up the trinket and handed it to her.

Shayla shook her head. "Keep it as a good luck charm."

Biting back his usual spiel about luck, he thanked her and went to the locker room.

Seated at his stall, Paddy finished his pre-game prep. Then, as the clock counted down to game-time, he rolled the shamrock back and forth across his palm. He should leave the charm in his locker. Instead, he taped it to his right sock, above his skate. He glanced around to see if anyone had noticed, but they were all listening to the coach's instructions.

When the team went out for the start of the game, Paddy deliberately didn't replace his glove. Electricity zinged up his arm again, even stronger, as he tapped Shayla's hand.

Her eyes widened. Clearly she felt it too.

From the opening face-off, Paddy played better than he had in weeks. His passes were crisp, his shots accurate. Only a sharp Flyers' goaltender kept the score at 0-0 at the end of the period. A goal was coming, Paddy sensed. It wasn't luck; the time had come for the

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ice to tilt in his favour. Still, he removed his glove to pat Shayla's hand and relished the now-familiar sizzle.

For the first time, Paddy followed a superstitious routine as he headed out for the second period. He rubbed the charm taped to his sock and tapped Shayla's hand, before putting his glove on.

Barely twenty seconds in, he scored a beauty. As he skated to the bench, he searched out Shayla and Max, who were cheering, and saluted them. When he scored a second, ten minutes later, he saluted them again.

At the intermission, Paddy handed Max one of the goal pucks. Back in the locker room, he scrawled on the back of the other in silver Sharpie - Dinner?

As he went out for the third period, Paddy repeated his routine, then handed Shayla the puck. She blushed, looking pleased.

Though he didn't score again, the Ice Cats won the game. Maybe there was something to this luck nonsense, after all.

Leaving the ice, he was surprised that Shayla didn't mention his invitation. No message awaited him in the locker-room. Nothing arrived while he was doing his interviews, showering or dressing.

So much for luck.

He didn't know why he was so bothered. It wasn't like they'd said more than a few words to each other. He believed in love at first sight about as much as he believed in lucky charms, yet he'd felt a connection

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inside. He'd thought she had too. Obviously not.

He wrapped the shamrock in a tissue, then stuck it in the top of his locker. He'd give it to Max at the next game.

"Come on, man. I'm starving." Kenny punched his shoulder.

Paddy grabbed his gear. He hated corned beef and the last place he wanted to go was an Irish pub, but he couldn't duck out of the post-game dinner; he owed the guys for scoring the game-winning goal. "If they play 'Danny Boy', I'm out of there."

\* \* \*

"Being Irish should guarantee good luck on St. Patrick's Day," Shayla Friel grumbled, as she stomped towards the main entrance of the Ice Cats arena.

Though she'd been born in America, Shayla's parents had emigrated from Downpatrick, making her blood 100 percent Irish. That hadn't helped today.

She'd thought it had, at first. Her brother rarely missed a game, but when an unexpected job came up, he'd asked her to take Max. Then she'd got to 'meet' her favourite player. Paddy's interest in her was a dream come true -- though her dreams about him were much hotter than their actual encounter.

He was even better looking in person, with his dark hair, blue eyes and rugged jaw. Plus, there'd been that delicious fizz that had skated through her every time they'd touched.

But when Paddy hadn't said anything at the end of



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the game, let alone asked for her number, she'd become embarrassed. She must have imagined the connection between them -- everyone said she had her head in a rose-tinted cloud. He'd probably only been nice because she was Max's aunt.

Then, when she'd dropped Max home, they'd discovered one of the pucks was missing. He'd been so upset, she'd promised to return to the arena and get it. Unfortunately, finding an open door this long after the game had ended was a problem.

Which was why, having made a circuit of the building, she was now rattling the push bar of the locked east door, hoping to get the bored-looking security guard to open up.

He did grudgingly. "I'm sorry ma'am. You can't come in."

She explained the situation, but he wouldn't budge.

"Is there a problem?" A deep voice asked, over her shoulder.

Shayla's pulse jumped. Cursing silently, she forced a smile and turned. "Max lost the puck you gave him, Paddy. I was trying to get back in to see if I could find it. *He* won't let me."

"I'm not allowed," the guard protested. "Health and safety."

"I'll escort the lady and take responsibility for her. I've got to get my keys from the locker room." Paddy held the door open for Shayla.

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Once inside, she thanked him.

“No problem.”

Their footsteps echoed as they walked through the empty concourse. The smell of fast food lingered, even though the concessions were shuttered.

“Hopefully the cleaning crew didn’t find the puck. Not that I’m accusing them of taking it, but it’ll be hard to prove it’s Max’s puck.” She winced inwardly at her wittering.

“They’ll put anything they find in ‘lost property’. The Cats are pretty strict about that.”

“That’s good.” Shayla bit her tongue. “So ... great game. You must be pleased.”

“It’s a relief to be back on the score-sheet.”

“St. Patrick’s Day was lucky for you.”

“Yeah.”

Did his abrupt answers mean he wasn’t much of a talker or he didn’t like being with her?

When they got to the seats, she couldn’t see the puck. “Darn. It’s not here.”

At that moment, the shamrock from her other ear-ring dropped to the floor. Strange. She’d had the pair for years and they both broke on the same night?

Paddy leaned down to pick up the charm. “Wait -- there’s the puck.” He fished it out from between the seats.

“How did it get there?” Shayla frowned. “I know I put it in my bag.”

He shrugged, as he gave her the shamrock.

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“Weird. Like I know I put my keys in my pocket before I left.”

“Well, it’s lucky my ear-ring broke or we wouldn’t have found Max’s puck.”

A strange look crossed Paddy’s face as he handed her the puck. “That’s the one I gave you.”

She studied the hunk of rubber. “How can you tell? Does it have special markings?”

“Kind of. Flip it over.”

She did, and saw silver writing. “Oh. I didn’t see that before.” How had she missed it?

“I thought you weren’t interested,” he said uncertainly.

“Oh,” she said again. “No. I mean yes.” She bit her lip. “I mean I am. Interested. In dinner.” She laughed. “Feel free to change your mind if you don’t want to spend time with a babbling lunatic.”

“I’m brave enough to give it a shot.” He gave her a slow, sexy smile that heated her body, right down to her toes. “Let’s get my keys and I’ll buy you that dinner.”

As they walked down to the locker room, they debated favourite foods and restaurants. They both loved Mexican and hated Thai. Loved popcorn, hated pretzels. The only thing they disagreed about was barbecued ribs, which Shayla didn’t like.

Paddy’s keys were on the top shelf of his locker. He shook his head. “Definitely weird.” Then, he gave her a small, tissue-wrapped bundle. “But it gives me a

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chance to return this.”

The charm from her other ear-ring.

“You should keep it.” She smiled and passed it back. “The shamrocks brought us good luck. Your game, finding the puck and your keys.”

Paddy tilted his head, considering. “For sure, it’s been a strange day.” He tucked the bundle into his breast-pocket. “Perhaps it was the shamrock. Or perhaps it was you.”

“Me?” Her heart tripped.

“I think you could be my lucky charm.” He took her hand and linked their fingers. “You want to spend time with me and find out?”

Happiness filled her. “Definitely.”

As they left the locker-room, he grinned. “Maybe St. Patrick’s Day isn’t so bad, after all.”

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### **A Perfect Distraction** **A face-off—head vs. heart**

For Jake Badoletti, this year is all about his career. He has a rare second chance to make the most of being a pro hockey player, so no parties, no scandals. Too bad he's met a woman who could sideline those plans. Maggie Goodman is not his usual type—right down to being a single mom. Still, the sizzling connection with this gorgeous brunette can't be ignored.

With a little juggling and a lot of focus, Jake manages to have the game *and* Maggie. Then his performance on the ice suffers and a scandal erupts. Now he can't afford the distraction of Maggie...even if she is perfect for him.

### **A Perfect Trade** **A win-win negotiation?**

Truman "Tru" Jelinek's life is pretty much off the rails. With his professional hockey career on thin ice, and his personal life falling apart, he's ready to implement some serious changes. Helping Jenny Martin—the only girl he's ever loved—make her dreams a reality is a good place to start.

There's just one problem: Jenny doesn't want his help. She barely wants to speak to him. But Tru is prepared to negotiate a deal that even Jenny can't refuse. As trading favors turns into sharing passion, he has to face the truth that when it comes to Jenny, the game is far from over.

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## **A Perfect Catch** **He's the perfect catch...for now!**

When it comes to romance, Tracy Hayden is *not* looking for a rematch. She's had epic passion—and problems!—with professional hockey player Ike Jelinek. Brilliant on skates and magic in bed, his too-traditional-for-her views were like a bucket of ice water on their affair.

Then an injury takes Ike out of the game, and everything changes. Suddenly he needs her services-providing business—even though he once claimed it was their biggest problem. Tracy's determined to be professional, despite the sizzling attraction between them that won't go away. Maybe they need a second fling to fix that!

## **A Perfect Party** **Just Good Friends?**

Ice Cats defenseman, Taylor 'Mad Dog' Madden wants more than friendship from Lizzie Martin. Much more. So when a Christmas party provides the chance to kick their relationship up a gear, should he take it or will he lose her completely?

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Welcome to the world of the  
New Jersey Ice Cats!

Books in the series:

[A Perfect Distraction](#)

[A Perfect Trade](#)

[A Perfect Catch](#)

Short Story:

[A Perfect Party](#)

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[www.annasugden.com](http://www.annasugden.com)



# A PERFECT LUCKY CHARM

*There's no such thing as luck!*

Despite his name, Ice Cats' forward, Patrick 'Paddy' Mullrone, isn't Irish and doesn't believe in lucky charms. For sure, they won't help him get out of his scoring slump. But when a shamrock from the earring of a green-eyed beauty drops at his feet, he wonders if St. Patrick's Day might be lucky for him after all.

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